



Healthcare Case Study: Bon Secours Mercy Health

Empathia's LifeMatters EAP fostered strong program engagement and supported positive outcomes

Organization Background

Bon Secours Mercy Health (BSMH) is one of the largest healthcare systems in the United States and the nation's fifth largest Catholic healthcare ministry. It provides vital healthcare services in seven states, as well as locations in Ireland. With over 64,000 associates and providers, its points of service include 50 hospitals and over 1,000 sites of care.

Rooted in faith and strongly dedicated to its values, Bon Secours Mercy Health strives to be a ministry where “associates want to work, clinicians want to practice, people seek wellness and communities thrive.”¹

In 2018, Bon Secours Health System merged with Mercy Health to become Bon Secours Mercy Health. Empathia, Inc., began providing employee assistance program (EAP) services to Mercy Health in 2017 and to the new Bon Secours Mercy Health entity in 2019.

The Challenges

Healthcare organizations are faced with unique challenges that shape workplace culture and influence employee well-being. Healthcare workers must navigate seemingly endless obstacles to well-being, such as professional burnout, community violence and global health crises. These challenges are not unique to BSMH, but the commitment to identifying new and innovative ways to address workforce well-being sets the ministry apart.

Burnout Epidemic

For years, research has underscored the rising epidemic of burnout among physicians, nurses and other medical professionals worldwide. A 2019 report by the National Academy of Medicine showed that “between 35 and 54 percent of U.S. nurses and physicians have substantial symptoms of burnout; similarly, the prevalence of burnout ranges between 45 and 60 percent

for medical students and residents.”² The consequences of burnout can impact patient care as well as the well-being of individual healthcare workers. Burnout can create or reinforce toxic work environments and impose significant economic costs on hospital systems. BSMH ministry leaders were seeking creative ways to reduce the stigma of seeking help and, at the same time, provide emotionally safe access points for associates and providers to obtain EAP program services.

Traumatic Incident

Hospital systems do not exist in isolation. BSMH values being an integral part of the communities it serves. Its workforce is made up of members of those communities—friends, neighbors and parents with children in the local school system. When a tragic incident occurs, such as a school shooting, the impact sends ripples through the community. From the immediate impact on the victims, to the families, first responders, medical personnel, friends, neighbors and community as a whole, everyone is touched in some way. In 2018, a BSMH community experienced a fatal mass school shooting. Ministry leaders knew there would be both immediate and long-term mental health effects on staff and they wanted support available for the long haul.

Global Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has created additional layers of stress and anxiety around the globe. This is especially true for healthcare professionals as they continue to deliver patient care in the midst of great uncertainty, work to minimize personal exposure risks and endure long shifts coupled with increased separation from loved ones. Carving out time for self-care can be challenging even under the best of circumstances, and the competing demands and worries of a pandemic can make it feel impossible. Ministry leaders were looking for ways to make support more accessible for those with energy and time constraints.

BSMH continuously explores creative avenues for connecting individuals with available resources to improve well-being. Partnering with Empathia ensures services are delivered with sensitivity and respect for the ministry’s values and culture, as well as the pressures and demands experienced by BSMH associates and providers.

The Support

BSMH offers a rich landscape of benefits to its associates and providers because it believes a healthy culture focused on individual well-being is essential to amazing patient care. Through collaboration and consultation, Empathia’s EAP services wrap around BSMH’s existing benefits to enhance available resources. Empathia’s approach to service delivery allows the EAP to flex as the ministry’s expectations and needs evolve.

“Collaboration with [Empathia’s] team of experts has led us to innovative strategies like a mindfulness series specific to physicians, time-off packages to encourage rest and relaxation for reliable service and COVID webinars which gave associates practical skills in the ‘new normal.’”

Ashley Moody, MPH, RD, Well-being and Recognition Operations Partner
Bon Secours Mercy Health



Initiatives

Caregivers are at the center of BSMH's and Empathia's proactive approach to enhancing the well-being of the ministry's associates and providers. Together, the two organizations partner on initiatives geared toward addressing stress, relieving compassion fatigue and improving resilience—whether at work or beyond. These initiatives often offer associates and providers welcoming ways to interact with program services and become more familiar with available resources. Attending a presentation or utilizing a vacation planning resource is an easy early encounter with the EAP. Once an individual is comfortable with using program services for routine resources, it may feel safer to use the program when faced with urgent concerns.

Mindfulness Initiative

Empathia partnered with ministry leaders on a mindfulness initiative geared toward BSMH leaders and medical staff. As part of the initiative, Empathia developed and delivered a series of live and recorded sessions designed to improve personal wellness and professional effectiveness through the application of mindfulness practices. The recorded sessions are now also accessible to all BSMH staff online.

PTO Initiative

As a way to address stress in the workplace and encourage staff to use their vacation time, Empathia created pre-packaged getaways and quick trip ideas for BSMH associates. Destinations were identified within driving distance and packages included suggested hotels, restaurants, area attractions and entertainment. Links were also provided to related resources, such as how to find a kennel or dog walker. With the majority of the research and planning already done, associates could book the components that appealed to them. Packages were updated seasonally. In addition to making it easier for associates and providers to use vacation time, the initiative helped destigmatize contacting the EAP by highlighting the everyday resources available through the program.

Shooting Aftermath Support

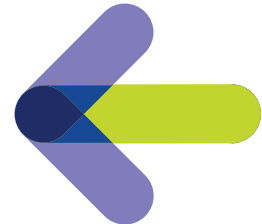
It is often in moments of crisis when the true strength of a partnership is experienced. One such moment occurred in 2018, following a fatal mass shooting at an area high school. Empathia collaborated with ministry leaders over several months to support staff resilience across multiple locations, serving hundreds of individuals as a result of the incident.

In a crisis, a “one size fits all” approach is not effective for promoting long-term healing and resilience. Given the significance of the incident and the impact on personnel, Empathia provided support in close consultation with ministry leaders over a long period of time. To ensure a rapid response, local mental health counselors were deployed to hospital and clinic locations the day of the shooting. As these counselors began meeting with individuals and rounding at nursing stations, Empathia corporate clinicians traveled onsite, including BSMH's Empathia account executive, Alyson Kaiser. Empathia account executives become immersed in workplace culture for all new client contracts, so having Alyson respond meant that Empathia's expert on BSMH was on hand to ensure the overall response conformed to ministry procedures and expectations. Alyson was able to continue building on the trust she had already established with BSMH leadership, utilize pre-existing communication pathways to connect resources with individuals and workgroups in need of support and act independently of Empathia's corporate structure to ensure a rapid, flexible response.

In the days and months that followed, Empathia met with individuals, teams, front-line supervisors and executive leadership to provide ongoing support and consultation, assuring impacted workers that their experiences mattered and working to break down any stigma related to seeking services for mental health needs. Trainings on such topics as personal resilience, pathways to healing and coping with grief and loss were also provided.

“Empathia not only committed to supporting our associates in the moment, but continued ongoing trauma response at key points throughout their recovery by proactively anticipating when the need for help would be greatest.”

Ashley Moody, MPH, RD, Well-being and Recognition Operations Partner
Bon Secours Mercy Health



COVID Support

Across industries, connection with employees during the pandemic has required employers to get creative. Healthcare organizations have especially complex needs because they operate 24/7, 365 days a year and their workforce may have limited energy and time left after fighting COVID. BSMH, with associates and providers spread across multiple states, time zones, healthcare facilities and shifts, has leveraged technology to expand the reach of its support.

Crisis Support

Over a period of eight months, Empathia facilitated tailored individual and group virtual crisis support sessions to associates and providers within an area particularly hard hit by the virus. Sessions were conducted by Empathia counselors familiar with, and sensitive to, the experiences of BSMH personnel.

Psychoeducational Support

Although Empathia offered a series of psychoeducational support sessions to its book-of-business, private sessions were provided to BSMH’s associates and providers. Topics included stresses faced by healthcare workers, the pandemic’s impact on home and work, as well as self-care strategies. These private sessions allowed attendees to receive more personalized attention and support.

Self-care Training

Recognizing that carving out time for self-care can be challenging even under the best of circumstances, Empathia partnered with ministry leaders to offer live online and recorded training sessions. These sessions were tailored to BSMH’s population and time constraints—ranging in length from three to 30 minutes—and focused on mental well-being topics. Adapting training offerings to meet the needs of BSMH meant more associates and providers were able to take advantage of these resources as their time and energy allowed.

Mindfulness programming that lasts minutes, as well as virtual support webinars and counseling sessions, all allow mental health to stay front and center.

The Impact

Bon Secours Mercy Health Engagement & Outcomes Statistics

30%

Total 2020 program engagement

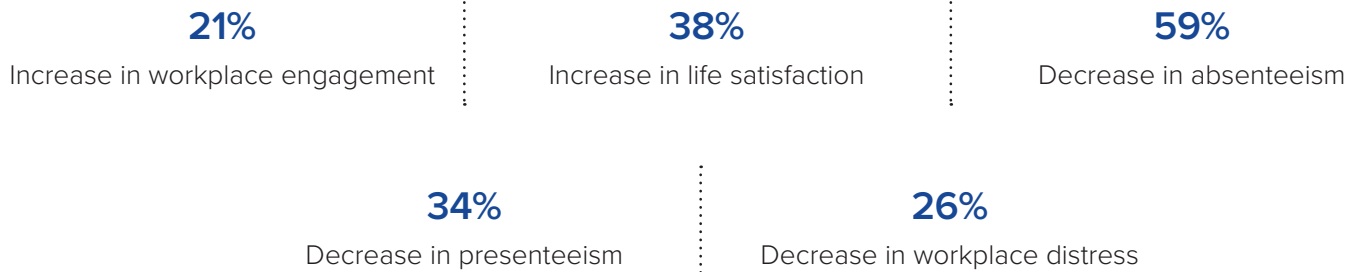
99%

Total 2020 client issues resolved within the EAP, without needing further assistance from other employer-provided insurance benefits



Workplace Outcome Suite® (WOS) Results

The WOS is a best practice tool used for measuring and evaluating the behavioral impact of EAP services on individuals. As a result of working with Empathia's LifeMatters EAP, Bon Secours Mercy Health has experienced the following cumulative results:



¹Bon Secours Mercy Health. (n.d.). Mission. Retrieved January 8, 2021, from <https://www.bonsecours.com/about-us/mission>

²National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2019). *Taking Action Against Clinician Burnout: A Systems Approach to Professional Well-Being* (p. 1). Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

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